



ASSOCIATION OF
CORPORATE TRAVEL
EXECUTIVES

Asia-Pacific

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Testimony before the House Subcommittee on Aviation
"Cell Phone on Aircraft: Nuisance or Necessity"
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Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee for the opportunity to testify on this issue. I am speaking today on behalf of the 2500 members of the Association of Corporate Travel Executives (ACTE), who represent the business travel interests of major corporations as well as the aviation, hospitality, surface transportation, and support industries of the travel sector, in 30 countries around the world. ACTE's primary objective is to promote global corporate growth and stability thorough the science of advanced business travel management. Our association seeks to maximize the corporate return on travel investment, while boosting the productivity and effectiveness of the business traveler on the road.

As you are aware, business travelers derive the most out of their travel time through a number of electronic devices that are an extension of their offices. The cell phone is undoubtedly the most common of these and the lowest common denominator shared by all travelers. The traveling executive, however, uses a cell phone as a source of information vital to the current business at hand or to begin arranging future business. The key word is "business." Judicious use of the cell phone will convert isolated hours spent in flight into productive revenue generating potential, especially on long flights.

Slightly more than half of our members responding to a poll indicated that business travelers would be more productive through cell phone access while in flight. We have yet to assign a dollar value to the number of working hours that could be enhanced by cell phone access in flight, but our initial research indicates it could be in the millions.

While ACTE's message is to encourage the committee to relax the restrictions on cellular phone use en route, I understand there are many diverse opinions regarding these devices. The issue at hand, however, is providing choice. If business travelers can make better use of their time through cell phone access, they should have that option.

Using a cell phone in flight must, of course, come with a high degree of responsibility and consideration for other passengers. I am not insensitive to the concerns of others who predict that airliners will reverberate with the endless musical tones of cell phones, or worse, incessant loud conversations. ACTE recommends that any cell phone use on commercial aircraft require mandatory use of a headset and that cell phones be set for silent ringing in the vibrating mode. The prescribed in-flight use of cell phones could be detailed in a seat-back card,

an in-flight magazine, and in the announcement at the beginning of each flight. There may be some transitional hiccups introducing this concept, but these occur with any change in procedures. Eventually, the public is informed and the process becomes standard operating procedure.

I can assure you that business travelers do not make the kind of social calls that critics fear will flood crowded cabins. It is easy to identify the executives in airports speaking into "Bluetooth" headsets. They are not shouting over the noise in the airport. Furthermore, I believe allowing the use of cell phones en route will accelerate the development of more sensitive technology to mask the noise. This is evident in the difference in cell phones today from those that were available only two years ago. The more sophisticated models are multifunctional microcomputers with better reception. I believe headset and noise-canceling technology for cell phones will continue to evolve, especially if there is a specific market for it.

Noise-canceling electronics for microphones and earpieces are already commercially available for the recreation market. These enable individuals to speak and be clearly understood, in a normal voice tone, against a variety of strong background noises. The cost and availability of these devices will drop as market demand increases. There could even be a profit-generating opportunity for the airlines in having headsets available for purchase or rental on each flight.

Finally, there may be a middle-ground position to take in relaxing the restrictions of in-flight cell phone use. Ninety-two percent of our members responding to a recent survey overwhelmingly indicated that they would favor a move permitting text messaging either via cell phones or Blackberry-type devices, allowing travelers to access critical e-mail while en route. An action of this nature would improve communications for the business traveler, while allowing the communications industry to prepare for a move that must eventually come.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman.